

# Letter to the Editor

## The effective cost of healthy diet

Dear Editor,

The epidemiological transition and the increase of non-communicable chronic degenerative diseases (CNCD) need to make the National Health System (NHS) sustainable<sup>1</sup>.

An increase in the consumption of healthy diet, based on a diversity of plant-based foods, typical products of the Mediterranean Diet<sup>2</sup> and a low amounts of animal source foods, with a limitation greater than 50% of less healthy foods, such as added sugars and processed meat<sup>3</sup>, are recommended.

As underlined by the EAT-Lancet Commission, feeding 10 billion people with a healthy diet, within the safe planetary limits for food production, is a condition both possible and necessary to be implemented within 2050<sup>3</sup>.

However, according to Hirvonen et al<sup>4</sup>, at least 1.58 billion people cannot afford the diet, healthy and sustainable, described by the EAT-Lancet Commission. In fact, the 'ideal diet', which would be desirable to reach by 2050, would keep people and the planet healthy, with an average cost of \$ 2.84 per person per day. With this cost at almost 90% of a family's daily per capita income, the healthy diet would not be feasible for nearly 1.6 billion people, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia<sup>4</sup>.

To these statements it can easily be objected that it is known that the global food system today is not sustainable, both in environmental terms than in human health. A diet should ensure, beyond the environment, a correct nutritional level and guarantee the state of health. Moreover, food prices should be analyzed both in terms of impact on sustainability and impact on health.

One of the most effective tools for CNCDs prevention is personalized diet therapy.

Mediterranean Diet is an example of accessible diet<sup>5</sup>. Mediterranean food mode, with Adequacy Index (MAI) >7 units, has low-cost, and it is socially acceptable at a global level Mediterranean<sup>6</sup>.

Dramatically, MAI has shrunk all over the world, and in Italy, where the Mediterranean Reference Diet was born<sup>7</sup>.

In parallel with the MAI reduction, an increase in the consumption of junk and ultra-processed food was observed. It is estimated that a 10% consumption compared to the daily calories increases the mortality risk by 14%<sup>8</sup>. It has been observed that adherence to the Mediterranean pattern is inversely proportional to the availability of ultra-processed foods in the home<sup>9</sup>.

The promotion of nutrition according the Mediterranean diet<sup>10</sup>, recognized as healthy diet prototype, is fundamental to improve the health status of the population and reduce health costs, an important strategy for the high ethical value and sustainability of the system.

### Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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